

DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES  
OF  
EBMC

2.2.3 Divorce and Remarriage

INTRO: In our doctrinal statement, we have 10 secondary doctrines that we hold to. And I think that truly they are secondary issues, with one exception, and it is that of divorce and remarriage. I think the reason this was left to stand in the secondary section is because we are at odds with well over 90% of Evangelical Christianity. This majority group allows for the remarriage of the so called 'innocent party' even though the other partner is alive.

Here is how our statement reads: *We believe that marriage is honorable (God recognizes and approves of the marriage of believers and unbelievers) in all (Heb. 13:4) and that the marriage bond is in force until the death of either partner (Rom. 7:1-3) and that this is the only condition upon which one may remarry (1 Cor. 7:39). All other remarriages constitute the sin of adultery which, if persisted in, the individual shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21; Rom. 7:1-3). We believe that the exception clause as recorded in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 refers to unfaithfulness during the betrothal stage of Jewish weddings. For this reason this exception clause is found in Matthew, who wrote specifically to the Jews, and not in Mark and Luke whose Gospels were written to the Gentile world.*

It comes as a surprise to many who have grown up in this community that by far the majority of Evangelical Christianity disagrees with us in this doctrine which we view as very, very important. So in these few brief messages I want to give an overview of the OT and divorce and then cover the NT a little more in depth.

I can say without fear of contradiction that the most important opinion in the Bible on this subject is that of the Lord Jesus Himself. We will give an entire message to His words on this subject. But for now, let us look at the OT and divorce.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT AND DIVORCE

A. The Most Important Passage (Gen. 2:21-25)

So, what does the Bible have to say about divorce and remarriage? Well, we are going to begin in the OT and when you go to the OT, the most natural place we want to go on this question is Deuteronomy 24. But when the Jews questioned Jesus on divorce and remarriage, He did not go to Deuteronomy 24, a place they too resorted to on this question. He went to creation and it is at creation we learn God's design for marriage. He went to Genesis 2, not Deuteronomy 24.

Genesis 2:21-24 says this: 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Now let me pose a question for you: Why did God make Adam first, and that from the dust of the ground; why did He make the woman second, and that from the flesh and bone of Adam? When I do premarital counseling I stress to those seeking marriage that everything in the creation account has important foundational truths for us. You see, He made the man first. That has very important lessons for us. He did not make a man and a woman or a man and a woman and children. He began by making the man. Then he caused the man to sleep and took a rib from him and from his flesh and bone he made one woman. Now he could have made two men and one woman or one man and three women or any combination of these. But He did not. He made one man from the dust of the ground first and then He made one woman from the flesh and bone of man.

And what is the significance of this fact? Well, we have it right there. God made her from Adam and then brought her to Him. There was His approval on the marriage relationship. As a matter of fact, it was all His plan. And after He brought her to Adam, he said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." This woman was made from the man

to show the one flesh relationship and that one man should be married to one woman.

Now we do not willingly divide our body. We have but one body, so we do not readily go and cut off a hand, and thus divide the body. When you divide anything from the body like that, that part dies. God made the woman from the man, not the dust of the ground, to show that she is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. So when God was finished with creating man and woman and performing the first marriage, He said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Here was the lesson in the way God created man and woman. It is one man for one woman, and they become one flesh. You do not divide one flesh anymore than we cut off members of our bodies. That is the most basic lesson on divorce and remarriage from creation. Divorce and remarriage causes division and death. That is basic.

#### B. The Most Used Passage (Deut. 24:1-4)

So, we have looked briefly at the most important passage, now let us look at the most used passage. After creation, years came and went; sin corrupted man's way of living, and 2500 years after creation we come to Deuteronomy 24. And verses 1-4 read like this: 1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then **let him write her a bill of divorcement**, and give *it* in her hand, and send her out of his house. 2 And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's *wife*. 3 And *if* the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth *it* in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her *to be* his wife; 4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that *is* abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance.

That is the reading of the KJV. And in verse 1 it gives an imperative that is unwarranted. It is not in

the Hebrew text. The instruction in the KJV is that if a man has married and he does not like the woman he married, because he has found some uncleanness in her, then he is to write her a bill of divorce and give it to her and send her away. But the NKJV gives a truer reading of this passage. It says: 1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, 2 when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 *if* the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, 4 *then* her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that *is* an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance."

Here the instruction is that when a man has divorced his wife and he has given her a certificate of divorce and she has remarried, and then the second man also divorces her, she is then not to go back to the first husband. It is worthy of note in the text that once she remarries another man, she is classed as defiled.

Now what I cannot understand is how Moses could even allow for divorce, no matter what the case. But it is the view of some, and I think it has some merit, that Moses gave this teaching in a time when divorce was rampant. That is evidenced by the fact that he had to instruct a woman not to get go back to her original husband after having had another man. So Moses gave this instruction, not as a norm for godly people, but to curb the excessive divorce in his day.

To put together a consistent view on divorce from the OT is something I have not yet been able to do, other than to say that God's design for man is one man to one woman, and that is to be for life. We can clearly gather from the OT that God hates divorce, and that He never intended that if a couple could not get along, they should divorce and marry someone else.

Let me say this about Bible interpretation. It is a well known rule of Bible interpretation that unclear passages must give way to clear passages. The Deuteronomy 24 passage is, without possible contradiction, an unclear passage. Check any number of commentaries, and you will find that to be true. There is no consistency among interpreters. Who knows, for example, what is meant by the words 'some uncleanness'? There is no question but that we have an unclear passage. Later we will look at much clearer passages.

Furthermore, as Joseph A. Webb points out, if we are so ready and willing to practice Deuteronomy 24:1-4 why would we not also practice such laws as Deuteronomy 22:5, that a woman is not to wear a man's clothing or that one is not to wear clothing made of two different kinds of material or that one is not to sow his field with two different kinds of seeds?

I would like to take Webb's thought one step further. If we are so interested in keeping Deuteronomy 24:1-4, why are we not equally willing to keep the rest of the OT marriage laws? Some time ago I perused the OT for marriage laws and in a short time found some 24 regulatory passages, almost all of which we do not practice today. In Deuteronomy 22:13-21 there are laws regarding unfaithfulness during engagement which we do not keep. In the same chapter in verse 22 are laws regarding adultery which we do not keep. Listen to the law, "If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel." In this same chapter, verses 23-29, are laws on rape which we do not keep. In Exodus 22:16-17 is a law on betrothed persons which we do not keep. In Deuteronomy 24:5 is a law regarding going to war right after marriage, which we do not keep. In Numbers 5:11-31 are laws on jealousy in marriage which we do not keep. In Leviticus 20:10 is a law on divorce which we do not keep. In Leviticus 20:11 is a law regarding a man with his father's wife which we do not keep. In Leviticus 20:12 is a law regarding a man and his daughter in law, which we do not keep, and so there are about 10 more which we do not keep.

Of the 24 regulatory passages I checked, the only one regulation we do practice, leaving out Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is the law regarding marrying close relatives. For example, Deuteronomy 22:30 says, "A man shall not take his father's wife..." Of the 24 different regulations given in the OT I checked, the only other regulation we want to hark back to besides marrying close relatives is Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Why do we keep going back to Deuteronomy 24:1-4? It is for one reason only, and that is because it seems to support our erroneous divorce views. And about Deuteronomy 24, Jesus said, "You have heard it said, but I say to you..." And thereby he annulled that one for our age as well. We will look at this later.

I want to make another point from the OT. We have, in Evangelical circles, by and large accepted divorce as an acceptable Christian practice, for what we call the **innocent party** in the marriage. Evangelical pastors are marrying the same person to a second partner that they married to a different partner before. I have often wondered what such a pastor would do if a man came with a wife on one arm and a lady on the second arm and asked the pastor to marry him to this second lady as well, and then maybe a third and fourth too. That of course is what we call polygamy.

Now I believe I know what would happen. The pastor, after such a request, would fall off his seat from shock. And after some recovery from his shock, then he would refuse to do this marriage. But after studying the Scriptures for some time, he would find many, many times more support for polygamy than divorce and remarriage. And after a while he would find Moses allowed for polygamy and David did and had many wives, and Solomon did and had hundreds of wives. And if the instruction against divorce and remarriage, even in the OT was not enough to keep him from remarrying even innocent partners, then he would soon marry men to a number of wives. Why? Moses allowed it (read Deut. 21:15-16).

Now let me make this statement, and you ponder its accuracy: *A pastor who marries a divorced person but would refuse to marry one man to more than one wife*

would be a very inconsistent pastor. There is far more in Scripture against remarrying a divorced person than against marrying one man to two, or three or even ten women.

Now if it is argued that Deuteronomy 24 allows for divorce and remarriage because God did not forbid it, then without question, polygamy is acceptable because God nowhere expressly forbids it. As a matter of fact, listen to Deuteronomy 21:15, "If a man have two wives, one beloved and the other hated..." And so, if we argue that divorce and remarriage is acceptable by God from Deuteronomy 24, let us be consistent and allow marriage to two or more wives.

### C. A Most Significant Passage

We have looked briefly at what I view as the most important passage on divorce and remarriage in the OT, and at the most used passage, now let us look at what I have called a most significant passage. Let us turn to this passage (Malachi 2:13-16 read). At the writing of this book, the Jewish people were in a back-slidden state. God was dealing with them and they made sacrifices and covered the altar with tears, and for all that, yet God would not relent. He had no respect to their sacrifices and He would not receive their sacrifices, so they cried and begged and plead with Him, all to no avail.

And in this passage Malachi says, you have just done one thing wrong and this is the second thing you have done wrong. First you married the daughter of a foreign god and second, you divorce your wives. And then you come to God and expect Him to bless you. You expect God to receive your sacrifices, and He will not receive them.

And then, after all this corruption, you say to God, "Why do You not respect our sacrifices! For what reason?" "So" Malachi says, "You want a reason, so I will give you a reason. I have observed how you deal with your wives. You deal very treacherously with your wives, and yet she is your companion. But, above that, she is your wife BY COVENANT! You made an agreement, a marriage agreement and now you are

dealing treacherously with her, and yet you expect God to receive your offerings!"

Now let me make a point here. Marriage is a covenant. It is an agreement between two parties. In our day, the agreement reads something like this:

John Doe, do you in the presence of God and these witnesses take Sarah Southerland, the bride by your side to be your wedded wife, will you love and cherish her, provide and care for her, in health and in sickness, in prosperity and in adversity, exercise patience, kindness and forbearance toward her, live with here in peace as becomes a faithful Christian husband, and keep yourself only unto her as long as you both shall live?

The only acceptable answer on which the marriage will be performed any further is the answer, "I do". The commitment of the bride is very similar. And when they have both said, "I do", the contract, the agreement, the covenant is binding. Now what is a person who divorces his wife or her husband before the death of the other party? He or she is a covenant breaker!

In Romans 1:29-32 is a horrible list of sins. And in verse 31 is a word translated by the KJV as 'covenant-breakers'. The NKJV has translated it 'untrustworthy.' Vines Dictionary says it means, "'not covenant keeping', i.e., refusing to abide by 'covenants' made." Not only is divorce and remarriage a terrible thing in itself, it also involves covenant breaking, another terrible sin. Here is one of the most intimate of agreements, and it is broken. You see, this agreement was until death. Not only does the Bible say that adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God, covenant breakers will not be there either. A divorced and remarried person is a covenant breaker.

Let me add something a little further to that. When you are invited to a wedding, and you go and you hear the marriage vows repeated and agreed to, you have been a witness to a covenant. Two witnesses sign the contract that goes to the government, all the rest are just as much witnesses in the eyes of God. And



when such a person wants to break that covenant, you should be one of those to rise up and cry 'foul'.

So, Malachi chides the people of Israel because they say, "God, what is the matter with You. We have cried to You and covered the altar with tears and You do not hear us. Oh God, what is Your problem? What is the reason for this?" And Malachi says it is because God has been a witness to every one of their marriages, but they have dealt treacherously with their companions who are their wives by covenant. God has heard this agreement. God has seen the unfaithfulness, and now He cannot hear them.

And then Malachi asks them this question: Did God not make you one? You will divorce your wife after Jehovah God made you one? And then Malachi asks a second question: "And why one?" Now the whole question is: "And why did God make you one?" I would ask it this way, "Why is marriage important? What is the value of marriage. Why should you remain faithful to your wife, rather than get divorced?" Well, look at the answer from our passage. Why did God make them one? He seeks godly offspring! There is the value of marriage. There is the shame of divorce. It brings about a lot of ungodly offspring.

There is something about marriage and divorce that affects children, by and large. Divorce and unfaithfulness does huge damage to offspring, children. For many a child, their moral compass is ruined when their parents divorce. And there is something built into children that causes them to fear divorce far above death. Children can cope with death; they cannot cope with divorce! One parent that remains true to the children and the covenant, though the other divorces, sets a lot of things right for children, and God seeks godly offspring!

And then Malachi instructs them thus: Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously. So what is this treacherous dealing? Look at it in the next verse (read verse 16). It is divorce, and God hates divorce! The words, "For it covers one's garment with violence" are hard to interpret. Nevertheless, they leave an ugly picture of divorce. Verse 16 then closes as verse 15 did, "Therefore,

take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously" and again, divorce is dealing treacherously.

There is much more information in the OT on marriage and divorce, but these are some of the key passages. We could argue for a long time on the intention of the OT but I think we do much better to go to see what the NT writers indicated, and much more, what Jesus Himself said about it, for He is not silent on this subject, and He is the supreme authority on this subject, as on all other subjects.

CONCL: In conclusion to this message, I want to add an area I have not dealt with and that is Church history. In Church history, the majority position until the 1500's was 'no divorce at all'! There were only very rare exceptions that I can find. Then, along came Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536). He was, as all history students know, a humanist. The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church starts its article on Erasmus like this, "Dutch humanistic scholar of Greek." He popularized the view that today is so prevalent in Evangelical circles. I believe it was his teaching that affected our early Mennonites, who also allowed for divorce and remarriage, as does our own Catechism. It must be recognized that the true Church, for the most of its existence, has stood almost unanimously against any kind of divorce. Marriage was for life, not ideally, but really.

The most important passage on divorce and remarriage is Genesis 2:21-25. Here you will find God's perfect will for marriage. A man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, for life! That is how marriage should be, not ideally, but really!

Now when Genesis 2:21-25 is obeyed, there is no need for teaching on divorce and remarriage, because it will never happen. There is no need to teach on polygamy, because it will never happen. God made one man and one woman, and they are to leave and cleave.

One of the major reasons why divorce and remarriage is so wrong, is because of the damage it does to children. We often think only of the adults, in such situations, but the children should be a major consideration in this topic. That is what Malachi brings out clearly.